Chapter 8. Shifting Identities: the human corpse and treatment of the dead in the Levantine Bronze Age.

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Introduction

Spanning a period of over two thousand years, the Bronze Age of the Levant (*c.* 3600-1200 BC) is characterized by the emergence of urban society, growth of social complexity and, in the latter half of the period, the fluorescence of city-states and 'great kingdoms'. Alongside the rich settlement and textual record of the period, is a diverse corpus of burial data which can provide insights into concepts of personal identity, human mortality, and the afterlife. Using a combination of documentary and archaeological evidence dating to the 3rd-2nd millennia BC, mortuary practices during this period have, to some extent, been characterized as showing a broadly linear development (*e.g.* Baker 2012), albeit with regional and individualistic variations. The key-unifying theme has been viewed as the desire to dispose of the body in a 'proper way', thus ensuring a comfortable existence in the afterworld (*e.g.* Katz 2005; 2007, Lundström 2013). Moreover, it has often been assumed that treatment of the dead, or at least the associated belief systems, was broadly the same throughout the Bronze Age for the vast majority of the population, whether elite or non-elite (*e.g.* Lundström 2013, 169). Recent research collated by the 'Invisible Dead' Project (Bradbury *et al.* 2016), however, offers another view. We argue that significant shifts in mortuary behavior and practice can be identified across time and space, pointing towards the existence of a multiplicity of beliefs and traditions during this period. By elucidating the marked temporal and spatial discontinuities of the Bronze Age burial record, this paper will start to explore the different kinds of identities and changing concepts of the body, personhood and ownership that can be identified over the two millennia encompassed by the Bronze Age. We will also

explore some ways in which these may have influenced the variable significance of the dead and their shifting roles in strategies of social and economic reproduction.

The dead in the Levantine Bronze Age: background and history

From the discovery of the remarkable finds at Jericho (*e.g.* Garstang 1932; 1933; 1934; 1936; Kenyon 1960; 1965; Nigro 2009; Sellin and Watzinger 1913), to the extraordinary findings at the Royal Palace of Qatna (*e.g.* du Mesnil du Buisson 1935; Morandi Bonacossi 2011; Pfälzner 2007, Pfälzner 2011, 2012), studies on traditions of death and burial have played a key role in archaeological investigations of the Levantine Bronze Age. Research, however, has often focused on the publication and analysis of key bodies of data, with the numerous publications of individual sites or cemeteries forming the mainstay of our knowledge (*e.g.* Kenyon 1960, 1965; Schaub and Rast 1989). Whilst, in recent years, there have been attempts to address wider questions or undertake regional or thematic studies (*e.g.* Baker 2012; Hallote 1995), there has been relatively little engagement with the sheer variety of ways of disposing of the dead, and even less with the uneven distribution of mortuary evidence over time and space. These aspects of the problem are not readily apparent until a large dataset has been complied and interrogated.

For the Levantine Bronze Age, Mesopotamian[1] textual records dating to the 3rd-2nd millennia BC provide us with a remarkable source of evidence. However, they offer a very particular insight, one that is very much centred on elite practices and beliefs. While these texts furnish us with significant information on post-burial rituals, and beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife (*e.g.* Katz 2005; 2007, Lundström 2013), as we will demonstrate below, they should not be taken as indicative of the choices afforded to 'ordinary' people (*contra.* Lundström 2013, 169). Clear contradictions exist between the

[1] Sumerian and Akkadian sources dating to the second half of the 3rd-middle of the 1st millennium BC (Katz 2005, 56)

textual and archaeological sources; a striking example is the concern for 'proper' burial that is very apparent within the texts. This, however, stands in stark contrast to the low number of burials detected archaeologically at particular times and places (Fig. 8.3; in more detail Bradbury and Philip 2016 in press). Osteoarchaeological research in the Near East and Arabia has developed substantially in recent decades, as have approaches that engage with research into population movements, demographic variations and taphonomic processes (Frölich *et al.* 2008, Gregoricka 2013; Sołtysiak and McMahon 2010; see also Solytsiak and Fetner in this volume). However, there has been a much less consideration of the ways in which the extensive body of 'legacy datasets', of widely varying quality, might be evaluated and brought into the discussion. While data screening is required to make this evidence suitable for comparative research, this seems a price worth paying to avoid having to disregard a large segment of the evidence pertaining to what is already a very fragmented picture.

Between 2012 and 2014, the 'Invisible Dead' project (Durham University) attempted to develop a methodology to draw upon and analyse both modern excavation results, and legacy data. By bringing together diverse and disparate datasets within a single database, the project sought to interrogate data on burial practices and treatment of the dead across the entire region, from the Late Chalcolithic (*c.* 4500 BC) to the end of the Roman period (*c.* AD 400). It quickly became apparent that the unevenness of the mortuary record across time and space (see Fig. 8.1-8.6) was unlikely to be solely attributable to traditions of research and the pattern of fieldwork. For example, when the 'expected number of dead' for any one site and chronological period was calculated (based upon estimates of population based-upon standard figures for 'persons per hectare', the length of individual periods, and a life expectancy appropriate to pre-industrial societies), the overall percentage of the estimated Bronze Age population, that is represented among the mortuary remains appeared to vary

from between 70+% at sites such as Jericho, to less than 2% at sites such as Qatna and Megiddo (see Bradbury and Philip in press). This is despite the fact that all three sites have been excavated extensively over many seasons. There are clearly a variety of potential explanations that might account for these substantial variations. For example, the differing environmental and landscape contexts of the cemeteries of Jericho, Megiddo and Qatna may have influenced where and how people could be buried. In addition, in contrast to the site of Jericho, relatively little 'off-site' excavation has taken place at either Megiddo or Qatna. It is also possible that substantial proportions of the population were being buried in rural locations, away from the central tell (*e.g.* Matthiae 2010), locales not easily discovered by archaeologists without extensive 'off-site' survey and excavation, both of which have been lacking within Near Eastern archaeology until relatively recently. Are these multitude of factors enough, however, to account for a variation of nearly 70% in the figures, or are there other possibilities?

One alternative approach is to question to what extent the situation described in textual records can be applied across the whole of this region. If 'proper' burial of the dead was indeed a minimum ritual requirement for a 'peaceful' afterlife (*e.g.* Katz 2006, 167; Lundström 2013, 169), how can we account for the sheer number of 'Invisible Dead' within the archaeological record? Perhaps, rather than using the textual record as a baseline for our interpretations, it should be treated as yet another part of the fragmentary picture, one which offers a glimpse into a sub-set of expectations, behaviours and actions relevant to a particular group, place and time. We would argue, therefore, that for the Bronze Age, we are dealing with traditions of disposal and treatment of the dead that differed substantially across time and space.

The Early Bronze Age I (3500-3000 BC)

The later 4th millennium BC has been characterised by many researchers as a period of population expansion, with the extensification of resource exploitation and diversification of socio-economic practices within both lowland and upland landscapes (*e.g.* Bradbury *et al.* 2014; Philip and Bradbury 2010). Based on evidence collected by the Invisible Dead Project (see Fig. 8.2), the EB I, at least in the Southern Levant, is characterised by a distinct peak in burial activity; the dead, as well as the living, in this period would appear to be highly visible, rather than invisible, to us. This situation is in complete contrast with that seen in the North, where the almost total absence of burials dating to the 4th millennium BC would appear to be the result of more than a simple research or fieldwork bias.

If we take the figures of dead for the whole EB I period in the Southern Levant (even when we exclude sites such as Fifa where we appear to be dealing with thousands of individuals (Kersel and Chesson 2013, 161), the overall percentage representation[2] of the dead, as a proportion of the overall MNI recorded by the 'Invisible Dead' project for each region, peaks during this period (Fig.8.3). Having said this, it clear that the distribution of the dead is not even across this whole region. Sites and burial assemblages, such as those from Bab edh Dhra' (Schaub and Rast 1989) and Jericho (Kenyon 1960; 1965) with multiple successive interments in shaft and chamber tombs, may represent aggregation locales for the dead, foci where individuals from multi-sited communities (*i.e.* Bradbury *et al.* 2014, 220) may have come together to deal with their deceased. Do, however, these sites represent the norm for EB I society? Tens of multiple successive tombs have been documented from sites, such as Megiddo and Tell el Farah North (Ilan 2002, 93), however, elsewhere (*e.g.* Ai, Azor, Tell en Nasbeh) only a handful of tombs (between four and six tombs) have been recovered (*ibid.*). Intriguingly, the lack of burials from the southern coastal region, has yet to be fully

[2] Based on the minimum number of individuals (MNI) recorded for each period (e.g. the EB I) divided by the total MNI recorded for the southern/northern Levant across all periods studied by the Invisible Dead Project and plotted out by hundred year time blocks.

explained. We might, therefore, be dealing with significant spatial variation in burial practices within the Southern Levantine region. Certain locales may have been intensively used for burial, whilst others were reserved for specific individuals or groups. Equally, there may be a degree of temporal variation. These discussions require greater elaboration than allowed for here, but point towards the importance of dissecting patterns of burial distribution at both a macro and micro level.

Turning to the Northern Levant, the most striking feature of the burial record is the very limited evidence from the late 4th millennium BC. Apart from a number of child jar and adult burials from the site of Hama (Thuesen 1988, 95-109), a secondary burial from the site of Jerablus Tahtani (see Fig. 8.2 and Peltenburg 2015, 44-5), and the well-known jar burials from Byblos that are assigned to the *Énéolithique Récent, c.* 3700-3000 BC (Artin 2009, 2010, 2014-15) we have an almost total absence of evidence. In contradiction to Artin's (2009, 76) argument for the continuity of jar burial practices from the Neolithic, the finds from Byblos are, in many ways, unique; adult jar burials are known from Sidon Dakerman (Artin 2014-2015, 24-27) and Hama (Thuesen 1988, 95-109), although no other site from this region shows such a high proportion of adult jar burials. Moreover, whilst Byblos, in terms of numbers, might fit into a more 'southern' framework of practice and belief, with a large proportion of the overall population being buried in an archaeologically visible manner, as above, it is likely that we are dealing with a particular coastal tradition or localised tradition. Whether Byblos is included in counts for the Northern Levant or not, the imbalance in numbers of dead between the Northern and Southern Levant is still clear and requires explanation.

Perhaps for the late 4th millennium BC communities of the Northern Levant, burial, or at least burial in a manner that is detectable through archaeology, was neither a necessary or relevant practice. This period witnessed a significant break with the attitudes to,

and treatment of, the dead that had existed in earlier periods. Brereton (2016, 209) has attributed this shift to changing perceptions of persons, with traditional kinship ties being "subverted in favour of a corporate identity shaped by production within, and service to, emerging urban institutions". Indeed, it may be that in this region, burial in a manner that ensured the long-term preservation of the physical remains, only re-emerged later, because it did so in tandem with the increasing social differentiation and emergence of the particular forms of elite behaviour that characterize the 3rd millennium BC. It is interesting to note that Stork's (2015, 121, Table 4) study of metal commodities from the 4th-mid 3th millennia BC in the Upper Euphrates Valley highlights, not only the small number of burials dating to the 4th millennium BC, the majority of which are infant burials, but also the small percentage of graves dating to this period that contained metalwork. This is in direct contrast to the subsequent EB I-II period (*c.* 3100-2600 BC), when both the number of burials and of metal grave goods, increases. The majority of these examples, however, derive from Anatolia, which lies outside the Invisible Dead study area. However, the limited number of burials documented for the 4th millennium, the fact that the majority of these contain infants (Stork 2015, 123), and the lack of metal goods included in burials in this area, are in accord with a lack of investment in, and relevance of, burial during this period. Based on this evidence, we have to consider the possibility that, in contrast to the situation in the Southern Levant, where the use of burial as a tool for social expression appears to have had a considerable history, for the majority of the population in the Northern Levant, disposal of the dead during the 4th millennium BC, may have involved little more than the shallow burial of human remains, or even deposition within a river – where these were available.

The Early Bronze Age II-III (c. 3000-2500 BC)

The early to mid-3rd millennium BC is a period during which mortuary practices are characterised by the marking of individuals and diversity of practice. Both southern Mesopotamia[3] and the Euphrates Valley (compare Figs. 8.2 and 8.4) show a notable increase in interment during this period and there is growing variation between individual burial assemblages and evidence for the continued emergence and development of social differentiation. The appearance of highly visible monumental tombs in the Euphrates Valley, often containing individual interments associated with specific sets of 'grave goods', and associated with new ritual forms, points towards the growing importance of local elites and the co-opting of existing lineages into new social systems (Cooper 2006, 223-236; Peltenburg 2013, 243-5; Sang 2015, and see Yukich this volume for further discussion). However, the burial record also shows clear evidence for the integration of different traditions and approaches to dealing with the dead. Structures such as the White Monument at Tell Banat (McClellan 1998), illustrate the potential comingling of communal and individuating behaviours (Porter 2002), ways of embedding, expressing and continuing to strengthen communal social ties within an overall framework of increasing social differentiation and elite aggrandisement. Settlement along, and in the hinterland of, the Euphrates Valley is noted to have increased dramatically during the middle and late EBA (2650–2200 BC) (Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 69-73). Surveys, such as those around Titris, Carchemish and Sweyhat, indicate that EBA settlement developed rapidly and may have been, at least partly fueled by an influx of population, from other areas. It appears that in the context of these rapid changes, including a period of population expansion, that burial came to play an important role in marking group and individual identity. Indeed, rather than being based upon an existing strong and developed tradition of interment, burial practices in the Euphrates Valley may represent a response to economic and political change, that while particular to the

[3] Although a substantial proportion of this evidence for Mesopotamia is derived from the Royal Cemetery at Ur (Molleson and Hogson 2003; Woolley 1934), another 'spectacular' case study.

region, drew upon a wider field of possibilities that reflected ways of materializing inequality that were taking shape across the Middle East.

The earliest evidence for this shift in burial behaviour may occur outside the 'Invisible Dead' study area, where, for example, at the site of Arslantepe, the so-called 'royal' burial (Frangipane 2007/8, 174-84), dating to the very beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, is associated with a new settlement layout and new social order (Frangipane 2001; 2007/8; Porter 2012, 164-73; Stork 2015, 125). Meanwhile, another example, Tomb L-12 at site of Qara Quzaq, also dated to the early 3rd millennium BC (Helwing 2012, 50; Olávarri 1995, 16-17) contained two individuals associated with pottery, beads and metal items. Although unique examples in many ways, these two tombs can perhaps be seen as a starting point for the shift in burial traditions that can be documented throughout the rest of the Euphrates region during the early-mid 3rd millennium BC. While interpreted by some as evidence for the existence and growth of *local* elites (*e.g.* Cooper 2006, 236-7), with Porter (2012) linking these burials to the growing importance of pastoralist groups, others have argued that the increasing visibility of burials and associated use of metal in grave contexts is indicative of the emergence of a more visible 'middle class' (Stork 2015, 130-1). Indeed, the over 300 graves[4], dating to the early EBA, that have been recorded from the Birecik Dam Cemetery provide us with clear evidence for the appearance of visible burials, as well as the deposition of grave goods, such as metal pins and ornaments within the graves (Squadrone 2007, 198). Ultimately, whichever term we choose to use 'local elite' or 'middle class', the relatively sudden widespread appearance of the dead in the Euphrates Valley is indicative of not only new identities and types of aggrandising behaviour, but also of wider connections between this region and both the Anatolian/Transcaucasian and Mesopotamian cultural milieu.

[4] 312 recorded graves, the majority of which are identified as cist graves

This distribution of the dead across the Northern Levant during this period is, again, however, not even. For example, there is a significant absence of 3rd millennium BC burials in the Orontes region. In contrast to earlier discussions, this paucity of evidence may well relate to the relative limited off-tell explorations of EBA horizons in this region, especially in comparison with the wide scale rescue excavations and investigations which have taken place along the Euphrates (Helwing 2002, 49).

In contrast to the fluorescence of burial activity in the Northern Levant during the early-mid 3rd millennium BC, an overall decline (but relative to a high base-line) in the visibility of the dead is documented in the Southern Levant. However, this, again, does not occur evenly across the entire region. Instead, at sites such as Bab edh Dhra' we have evidence for rectilinear charnel houses containing hundreds of individuals (Chesson 2003, 96). The careful curation and manipulation of human skeletal material in these cases appears to indicate a distinctive communal focus to burial and based upon this evidence, it has been suggested that local communities were organized heterarchically at this time (*e.g.* Chesson 1999, 2001, 2007, 2015; Philip 2003, 2008).

In many ways the apparent decreased levels of burial activity in the Southern Levant during the EB II-III, at least beyond a few key cemeteries, would appear to tie in well with evidence from the settlement record, with the nucleation of population groups into hilltop locations and walled settlements (*e.g.* Bradbury *et al.* 2014, 213-214; Joffe 1993; Gophna 1995; Philip 2008). Whilst there would generally appear to be a lack of overt social differentiation within burial assemblages, this does not rule out increased social differentiation *between* communities, or perhaps even between sub-groups within settlements (*e.g.* Chesson 2003, 96). Although bioarchaeological evidence from the site of Bab edh Dhra' cannot definitively point towards a diachronic increase in conflict over this period, a study by Gasperetti and Sheridan (2013, 406) does indicate that conflict was prevalent throughout this

period, with more than one in five individuals showing evidence for depressed cranial fractures in the EB I and EBII-III –a point consistent with the substantial fortifications that surround most major EB II-III settlements. Moreover, it would appear that whilst for some communities the continued expression of group identity, ownership and access to resources could be effectively communicated through the placement and treatment of the dead, for others this was no longer acceptable or possible.

Could we be dealing then, with a situation whereby from around the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, only part of the overall population was receiving an archaeologically visible burial, and that burial for all was by no means the norm? Within the Southern Levant, differentiation may have been based at a group level, with certain communities or groups choosing not to be buried, or being prevented from doing so in a manner that would become archaeologically visible. In the Northern Levant, with the increasingly complex dynamics between group and individual identity, burial may have served as a tool for both an emerging elite to mark themselves out individually and as a group, but also as well as a way to cement communal group ties.

It is clear that in contrast to the situation in the north, 4th millennium BC burials from the Southern Levant are quite numerous. We suggest that this indicates that there existed a greater degree of continuity with earlier traditions in the south, than is documented in the north, because, to borrow an idea from Stein's (1999) discussion of Uruk 'influence' in north-west Syria, the impact of the south's greater distance from (and lesser interest to) Mesopotamia, would have served to attenuate the latter's influence. In other words, the development of burial practices from 4th through the 3rd millennium BC in the northern and southern Levant demonstrated differing degrees of connection with earlier prehistoric traditions, which were then shaped by different sets of requirements that reflected the distinct nature of socio-political developments in the two regions.

The Early Bronze Age IV (c. 2500-2000 BC)

From *c.* 2500 BC onwards, burial numbers and the visibility of the dead seems to reach a peak in the Northern Levant. This period yields the largest relative MNI % of the entire Bronze Age within this area, whilst the overall number of sites with associated burial areas or tomb complexes also increases. The EBIV in the Northern Levant also witnesses a marked variation between burial assemblages, pointing towards an increased focus on elaboration and individual expression through the use of choreographed burial assemblages and mortuary traditions. Indeed, several scholars have pointed towards the increased visibility and extravagance of mortuary displays during this period (*e.g.* Peltenburg 2013; Stork 2015, 131).

The majority of this northern assemblage derives from sites along the Euphrates (see Fig. 8.5) and the heavy focus on this area is undoubtedly, partly a product of extensive rescue excavations within this region (*e.g.* Peltenburg 2007). Having said this, it is also likely that this bias is the result of tradition and local burial expression. As discussed above, conspicuous burial is characteristic of the region from the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC (*e.g.* Peltenburg 2013). Further west, substantial settlements such as Ebla (*e.g.* Biga 2007/8) and Qatna (du Mesnil du Buisson 1935, 155-8) are also associated with burial areas dating to the EBIV period. Chance finds from the area surrounding Hama may also indicate the presence of late 3rd millennium BC tombs (Riis and Buhl 2007), although this is very uncertain. Moreover, it is likely that the majority of tombs associated with the site of Rawda can be dated to the EBIV period (Castel *et al.* 2005, 2014). Thus, whilst the distribution of burial evidence is not necessarily even across the whole area, settlements and burial locales are often found in association with one another, with burial taking place both on (*e.g.* Selenkahiye (van Loon 2001) and off-site (*e.g.* Tawi (Cooper 2006, 242). It is interesting to note, however, that no tombs or burials pre-dating the EBIV period have been reported from

Qatna, although 4th millennium BC and EB III settlement has been documented at this site (Morandi Bonacossi 2007, 66). Whilst the appearance of burials may well coincide with the development of the site as a 25ha settlement (*ibid*, 70), the paucity of early-mid 3rd millennium BC burials beyond the Euphrates Valley, might well suggest that burial, as an archaeologically recognisable tradition, did not become significant before the mid-3rd millennium BC.

The situation in the Southern Levant represents, in many respects, a complete break from the traditions and practices of the previous centuries. Whilst we now see a fluorescence of new burial locales being used for the disposal of the dead, the overall MNI figures continue to decline, reaching their lowest relative point during this period. This, in part, might be explained by excavation and survey strategies. Substantial EBIV cemeteries (*e.g.* Wadi Rayyan (Yabis), Palumbo *et al.* 1990) do exist, distributed along inland wadi systems. In most cases, however, the associated skeletal data is not published or available to provide accurate MNI assessments.

These trends can also be linked to changing practices; the shift, from predominantly multiple to single burial, although it might also reflect a more generalised decrease in population from EB II-III to EB IV. Why these changes took place, however, needs to be more fully addressed. Whilst single burials dating to the EB I and EB II-III exist, they are generally exceptions (*e.g.* Tell Beth Yerah (Mazar *et al.* 1973). Moreover, given the steep decline in the visibility of the dead, at all but a few sites, during the early part of the 3rd millennium BC, we have to consider how and why traditions shifted so distinctly in the latter half of this millennium, setting the stage for an association of individuals with particular 'grave good' sets, which would continue through into the 2nd millennium BC and later.

Following a period of population agglomeration within walled settlements during EB II-III, the EBIV period in the Southern Levant has been characterised as period of socio-

economic collapse. Settlement and mortuary evidence appears to have become more widely dispersed across the landscape. Whilst the true extent and nature of this collapse has rightly been brought into question over the past few decades (*e.g.* Kennedy 2016; Palumbo 1991; Prag 2009; Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 90-2), it is clear that the power structures of the Early Bronze Age in both the Northern and Southern Levant shifted during this period because of a multiplicity of factors (*e.g.* Kennedy 2016; Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 90-2). Bearing this in mind, the similarity of Northern and Southern Levantine burial practices during the latter half of the 3rd millennium BC is striking. It is possible that many of the burial traditions and practices documented within EB IV cemeteries at sites like Jericho are reflections of burial and mortuary traditions deriving from elsewhere, for example EB IV Syria (*e.g.* Archi 2012, 20-4), manipulated and adapted from their original expressions and meanings. Southern Levantine EBIV ceramic forms showing connections to EB IV Syria are often associated with drinking practices, whilst metal objects that reflect northern styles occur within graves (*e.g.* Bunimovitz and Greenberg 2004; Prag 2009; Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 91-2). Both of these point towards the existence of interesting parallels between southern and northern EBIV funerary and status activities. Kennedy (2015) has suggested that the appearance of stone cist tombs at sites such as Tell el-'Ajjul in the Southern Levant points towards a movement of both ideas, but also possibly small numbers of people from the North towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC. Indeed, it is perhaps during this period that many of the concepts and beliefs behind burial traditions start to become 'internationalized' – perhaps a forerunner to the relative homogeneity that characterized the Middle Bronze Age across the Levant, a phenomenon that Burke (2014) has recently characterized as an 'Amorite' *koine.* With the growing importance of individual expression and status within the world of palace elites, and at a smaller scale, amongst local kingdoms, and powerful settlements, the ability to draw upon external or new traditions may have been a vital way of building new identities and

power structures following breakdowns in EB III society. Whilst not a mirror image of practices occurring further North, within societies with wider connections and amidst the probable movement of groups and individuals between South and North, burial would have been an important medium through which to establish and demonstrate new forms of identity and affiliation that took shape within a new world of changing interregional connections.

The Middle Bronze Age-The Late Bronze Age (2000-1200 BC)

From the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, both the Southern and Northern Levant come into step with one another and from this period onwards the two regions are broadly comparable in terms of visibility of the dead. The relative % MNI values[5] in the Northern Levant decrease at the start of this period, while values in the Southern Levant increase. Proportionally, by the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age II (1800-1600 BC), the numbers of dead in both regions account for just over 10% of the overall Bronze Age mortuary population, falling at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (1600-1200 BC) to around 5-7% (Fig. 8.3). If we also examine the spatial distribution of the dead across the two regions it is clear that mortuary remains are more evenly distributed across the landscape in the Southern Levant. This is even more apparent when the datasets are extended to take into account those sites with recorded MBA-LBA burial monuments or features, but for which no bioarchaeological information exists (see Figs. 8.6-8.7).

For the Northern Levant this pattern may be, in part, related to shifts in settlement and fieldwork strategies. Extensive rescue excavations along the Euphrates have added a wealth of information to our knowledge of the burial record of the mid-late 3rd millennium BC. However, following the end of the 3rd millennium BC, major settlement and

[5] The relative proportion of visible, recorded dead by period as a proportion of the *total* mortuary population of the region over time (e.g. the MNI recorded for the MBA as a proportion of the MNI recorded from the southern Levant between 3500 BC-1200 BC).

urbanisation activity along the Euphrates declines (Cooper 2006, 264-7; Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 71). Whilst some level of continuity and revival is documented around the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, public architecture, fortifications and importantly elite tombs are largely absent from the archaeological record of the Euphrates region at this time (Cooper 2006, 267). In contrast, recorded 2nd millennium BC burial sites in the Northern Levant now derive from intensive excavations at a more limited number of sites, restricting the numbers dead that are, at least potentially visible. This, however, cannot fully account for the growing number of 'invisible dead' *i.e.* those that we might expect to appear in the archaeological record, but who do not.

In the Southern Levant, from the beginning of the MBA and, in particular, from the MBA II we see a significant shift from single inhumation to multiple successive burial as the main method of interment. For example, at the site of Jericho during MB II an average of around 20 individuals is documented from a single tomb context (*e.g.* Kenyon 1965, 169). This may, in part, be responsible for the elevated MNI figures documented for the Southern Levant during this period; tombs containing multiple individuals, as opposed to single graves or tombs, are likely to yield higher rates of retrieval and therefore, fewer tombs require discovery and excavation.

Textual records, many of them dating from the 3rd-2nd millennia BC, point towards a strong belief in the 'Underworld' (*e.g.* Halotte 2001; Lundström 2013), at least by elite society. Combined with archaeological evidence from the LBA royal burials of Qatna, the role of the surviving kin in maintaining the family tomb and making prayers and offerings to the ancestors is also made clear (*e.g.* Lange 2014; Lewis 1999; Pardee 2002; Pfälzner 2006; Tsukimtoto 1985). In light of this situation, if we were to take the documentary evidence as a guide, we should expect the relative MNI percentage for this period to be much

larger, than is actually observed. The burial evidence, however, does not conform to this expectation.

For example, the evidence from Qatna would suggest that, based on a reconstructed MBA mortuary population of c. 62,000 individuals, we are potentially missing up to 99% of the expected dead for this period (Bradbury and Philip in press)[6]. Given the extent of excavations at Qatna and the surveys that have taken places in the surrounding region (*e.g.* du Mesnil du Buisson 1935; Morandi Bonacossi 2007; Pfälzner 2007, Pfälzner 2011), it is unlikely the lower numbers can be simply explained by the limited volume of fieldwork. In some regions we may, very well, be missing large proportions of the MBA dead. A tradition of 'non-elite' burial in small cemeteries in rural or village locales, outside the large centres of power where excavation has predominantly taken place, might be skewing our distributions. In cases such as Qatna, however, perhaps we are once more dealing with a situation whereby only a certain part of society was receiving an archaeologically recognisable burial. How might we explain this?

Our current working hypothesis is that as power became more concentrated within particular regional centres, so too did the ability for the elite to control, or least influence, who could be buried. The development, during the Middle Bronze Age, of a limited number of 'Great Kingdoms', each of which exercised hegemony over extensive geographical areas is interesting in this regard (*e.g.* Burke 2014) and further work is required to assess whether regional burial traditions can be detected within the areas occupied by these polities. The ability to control and influence such a fundamental part of human existence, might, again, point towards the absence of a strong pre-existing *archaeologically visible* burial tradition for

[6] The total expected mortuary population of Qatna is based on a life expectancy of 35 years, 100 individuals per hectare and a site extent of 110ha (e.g. Period length/35 year life expectancy x 100 individuals per hectare x 110ha). The number of recorded individuals for the MB-LBA period (based on min/max MNI figures) varies from 15-37 individuals (MB I) to 101-104 individuals (LBA II). Comparing the figures (expected mortuary population vs. recorded MNI) indicates that the excavated MNI amounts to less than 1% of the expected mortuary population. One or more of these estimates would have to be out by an order of magnitude, to require a significant modification of this position.

non-elite individuals within the region. Confirmation for this view might also be taken from the virtual absence from the burial record for MBA Syria of adult burials with no grave goods. Based on data collated by the Invisible Dead Project, we estimate that between 70-80% of the *definitively* dated MBA burials from the Northern Levant contained associated material[7]. Moreover, a large percentage of tombs, which were not found to contain material, had suffered from looting or had been re-used in subsequent periods. More work is needed on this subject in order to identify patterns of behaviour; for example are tombs without grave goods predominately associated with sub-adults? It is clear therefore that the extant burial record represents only a small proportion of the 'available' MBA dead. However, on the basis of current evidence there is little to suggest that all parts of the population are represented proportionally in the extant burial record.

What is particularly remarkable for both the Southern and Northern Levant, during the Middle Bronze-Late Bronze Age (MBA-LBA) is the intermixing of what appear, at face value, to be different burial traditions, or at least sub-traits/elements of overall traditions. Both multiple (*e.g.* Jericho (Kenyon 1960), Tell Sukas (Thrane 1978), Ugarit (Marchegay 2008)) and single burials (*e.g.* Ebla (Baffi Guardata 1988), Sidon (Doumet-Serhal 2014), Deir el-Balah (Dothan and Brandl 2010)) are well documented, and in some cases we find different forms and tomb types being used contemporaneously at the same site (*e.g.* Tell Dan (Ilan 1995, 121, Table 15.2) where chamber tombs, cist tombs and jar burials have all been dated to the same period). The use of specific tomb types for particular societal groups is apparent in some cases; for example the use of jar burials for infants or young children. However, additional research and analysis is required to determine whether any overarching patterns can be seen across the whole region during this period, or whether the various elements were remixed and deployed to suit specific local circumstances.

[7] Based on data collated from the sites of Qatna, Tell Sukas, Tell Shiyukh Tahtani, Tell Atchana, Ebla, Amrit, Ugarit, Hama, Tell Hadidi, Saraga Hoyuk, Umm el Marra, Tel Nebi Mend, Osmaniye

Baker (2012, 22) has suggested that larger chamber tombs, housing multiple individuals, developed from single-chamber tombs, holding one or several burials. Multiple successive tombs are common in both the MBA and LBA, and especially MBA II (1800-1600 BC), where an average of around 20 individuals is documented from a single tomb context (*e.g.* Kenyon 1965, 169). This partly accounts for the increased numbers in the MNI plots (Fig. 8.3). Chronologically, however, we cannot, trace a coherent development from single to multiple chamber at the majority of these sites. In fact, one of the weaknesses in Baker's analysis is that she skirts over the problems caused for her argument by the presence of numerous individual interments at sites in the Southern Levant during the MBA and LBA. Moreover, based on a more detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence, the notion that there was continuity of practice from the collective tombs of the Early Bronze Age through to those of the MBA and LBA (*e.g.* Baker 2012, 111) appears unlikely. With new radiometric evidence suggesting that the EB IV period, with its predominance of single burials, lasted for at least 500 years (Regev *et al.* 2012; Höflmayer *et al.* 2014), the continuing predominance of single interments during the first part of the MBA (*e.g.* Cohen 2009, 6-8; 2012, 310-11; Doumet-Serhal 2014, 34), suggests that we should view the multiple successive burials that are documented from around 1800 BC as a phenomenon that arose within the particular socio-political milieu of the MBA, and not as the re-emergence of EB II-III practices, that had somehow remained in the communal memory for 700 hundred years. This view gains support from the very different treatment of human remains in EBA and MBA multiple successive burials (*e.g.* Lange and Bradbury 2016), as well as divergences within the artefact repertoire.

One way to view this period might be as an era of experimentation, with individuals or families adopting particular elements of an overall 2nd millennium BC burial package, many elements of which originated in Syria, but did not all come south at the same time. The

tradition of equipping certain male burials with weapons may have been rooted in the world of EB IV Syria, while the multiple successive burials with their richer artefact assemblages that appear around 1800 BC (Hallote 1995, 111-112) may represent a more direct emulation by southern communities of Syrian MBA consumption practices (albeit employing a southern artefact repertory that included scarabs and stone vessels), in order to demonstrate their cultural, interregional and social connections.

Whilst our knowledge of MBA-LBA burial practices is, to a certain extent, dominated by classic case studies *e.g.* Jericho, Tell el-'Ajjul, Ebla and Megiddo, the MBA record as a whole reveals a wide range of different ritual behaviours, such as the burial of what may have been sacrificial humans and animals (*e.g.* Schwartz 2013, 510-513) and the placement of food offerings and secondary treatment of the dead (*e.g.* Lange 2014; and see Lange and Pfälzner this volume). In some cases the dominant approach of studying the forms and typologies of tombs (*e.g.* Gonen 1992) may have obscured variations in behaviour, treatment of the dead and the deposition of grave goods across this broad region. Again, much more work and analysis is needed. However, an interesting observation that is starting to emerge, and may have its roots in earlier late 3rd millennium BC practices, especially if we think of some of the '*elite'* or *'middle class'* tombs from along the Euphrates (*e.g.* Cooper 2006, 221, 229; Stork 2015), is the inclusion of a greater proportion of personal and, in particular, furniture items within burial contexts during this period. From the mid-late 3rd millennium BC, we have evidence for wooden furniture being deposited within tomb contexts from a small number of sites; for example Tomb 7 at Tell Banat and Baghouz burial Z121 (McClellan and Porter 1999, 109-10; Philip 1995, 146). However, based on the evidence collected by the Invisible Dead Project, the range and visibility of this material appears to increase during the 2nd millennium BC. Although this may partly be due to preservation at sites such as Jericho (Cartwright 2005), where wooden tables and boxes have

been preserved. Wooden tomb furniture and, in particular, possible 'pillow stones' have been documented from a number of other sites dating to this period *e.g.* Tell Kabri (Kempinski *et al.* 2002, 48, Tomb 439) and Hazor (Gonen 1992, 123). During the 2nd millennium BC, we appear to be dealing with situations whereby not only the dead, but also the tombs were dressed and arranged for burial.

Conclusions: Engaging with the dead across time and space

Many of the hypotheses discussed in this chapter are preliminary and require future research and detailed bioarcheological and material analysis. However, they have pointed towards the necessity of re-evaluating our understanding of past burial practices and undertaking multi-scalar analyses. We need to bring other types of society and 'persons' to the fore of our discussions. We believe that the outlines of the development of burial practices through the Early and Middle Bronze Ages of the Levant are now becoming clear. In the north the influence of Mesopotamian organizational principles may have downgraded the role of burial in communicating social information and terminated the traditions associated with Halaf and Ubaid communities. Following a period of minimal burial activity (at least for adults), during the 4th millennium BC, the 3rd millennium BC saw the emergence of a new set of burial practices that were associated with the growth of inequality and the appearance of elite behaviour. This is most clearly evidenced in the Euphrates valley, a key route for communication with Mari and southern Mesopotamia, although is echoed in the documentary sources from Ebla (Archi 2012). The traditions that crystalized during EB IV, formed the basis for the Syrian MBA tradition, although, as with EBA burials outside the Euphrates Valley these were never as numerous as in the south.

In the south the large number of EB I burials (4th millennium BC) suggests a degree of continuity with the local prehistoric tradition, and far less exposure to

Mesopotamian concepts, although the reduction in numbers and the concentration at a limited number of locations that is evident during EB II-III may point to a significant reworking of the symbolic role of burial in the region. These shifts were not, however, even across space and time and further investigation of localised behaviour and burial treatment are required to take this research further. The emergence of single burial during EB IV, along with the presence in graves of artefacts of Syrian styles, suggest a new phase of Syrian influence on the treatment of the dead by southern communities. We posit that this process was a 'spin-off' from the increasing mobility of people and ideas that grew out of a growing inter-regional livestock economy (Wilkinson *et al.* 2014, 91-92). However, at no time did the south witness the near-disappearance of burial that is so clear in the north.

Finally, when northern ideas did filter south on a large–scale during the MB II, they were appropriated within a world in which pre-existing notions of access to burial had been less effectively expunged than in the north, and in which the local polities were smaller and less dominant than those of Syria. This, we suggest, underlies the greater presence of MBA burials across the south when compared to the north, a point that otherwise appears out of step with the greater levels of wealth that could have been generated in the north. Thus, in the case of the MBA, the risk for archaeologists has been the easy assumption that burial customs that look superficially similar point to societies that were organizationally homologous. We would argue, however, that a quantitative assessment indicates that the formal similarities mask genuine differences between social and economic practices in the two regions, and that burial had a rather different significance in the two areas.

Overall, this paper's main aim, and indeed one of the aims of the Invisible Dead Project, was to engage with the dead at different scales of analysis, over broad stretches of time and across different study areas. More research is undoubtedly required in order to more fully understand local nuances and the heterogeneity of burial practices across larger regions,

something which was not possible here. By exploring shifts in the ways in which the dead were manipulated, moved, positioned and placed across time and space, not only in the Bronze Age Ancient Near East, but beyond, we hope we can ultimately come to a better understanding of how society in general has had to and continues to engage with the very real issue of human mortality.

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Figures

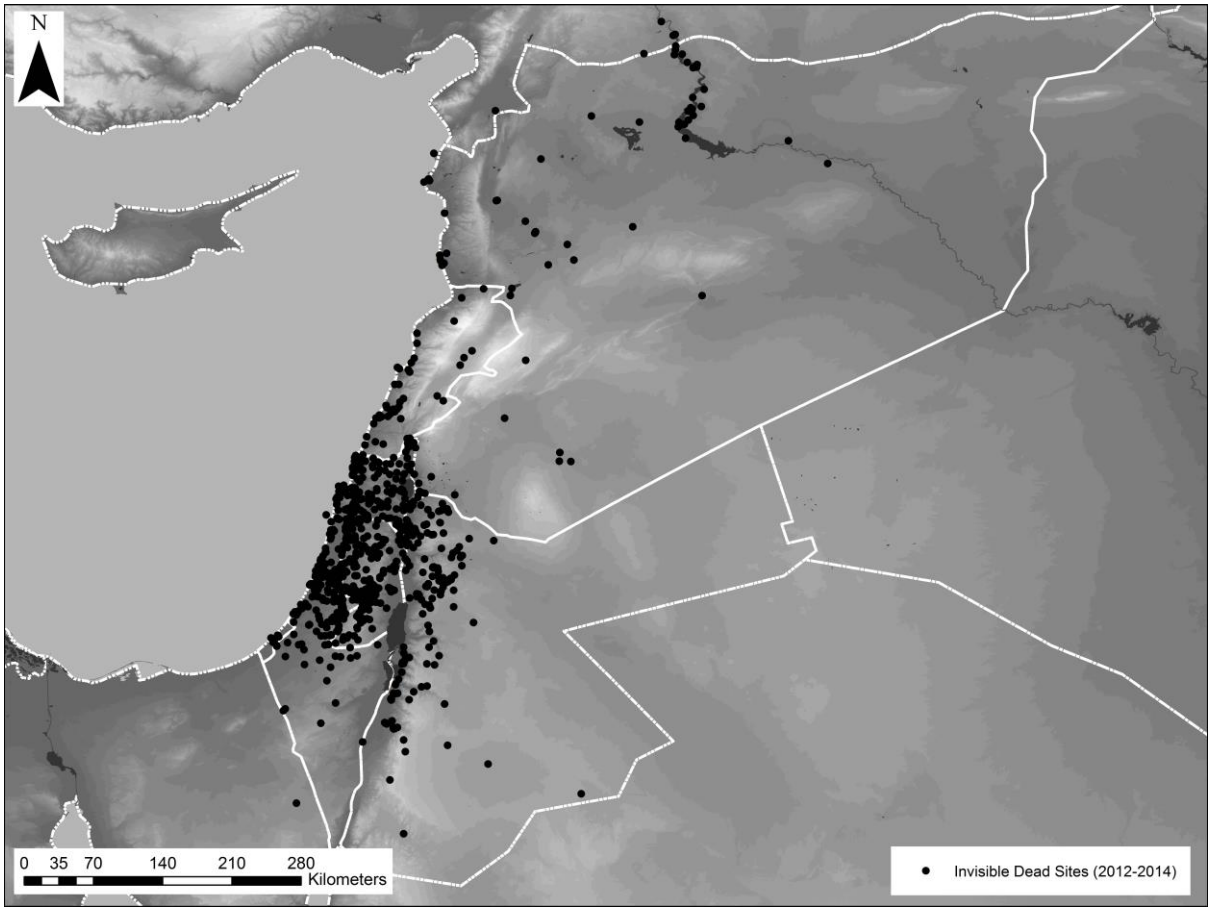

Fig. 8.1. Sites recorded by the 'Invisible Dead' Project dating to the 4th- 2nd millennia BC as yielding skeletal material, or evidence for burials. Notice the wealth of sites recorded from the Southern Levant, as opposed to the Northern Levant. The Invisible Dead Project covered a region spanning the modern countries of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The eastern boundary of our analysis is the Euphrates, so sites such as Mari do not appear on the distribution map.

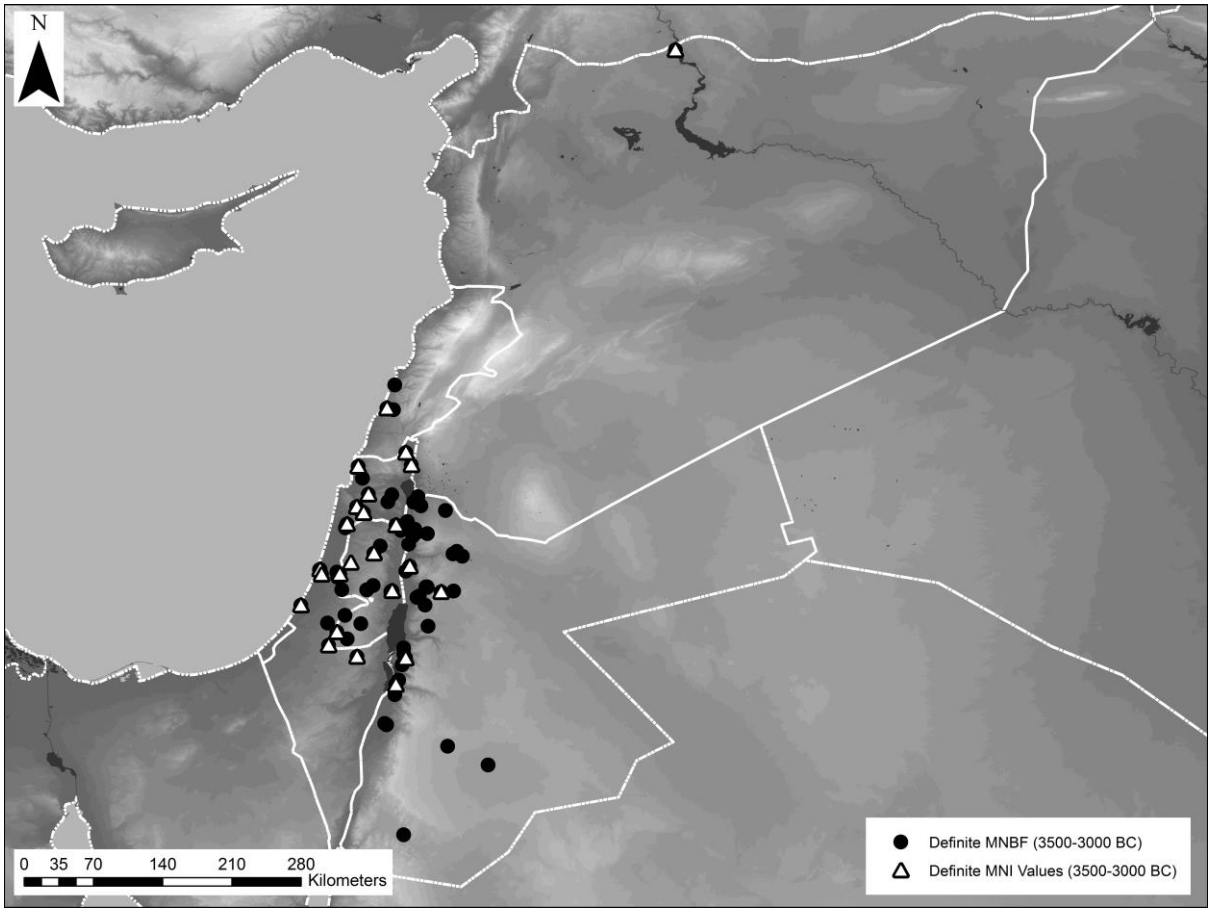

Fig. 8.2. Map showing the distribution of EB I burials (MNI and MNBF). The MNI (Minimum Number of Individuals) is based on sites where a definitive dating (note Byblos does not appear on the map due to this) and MNI have been listed. This map does not include sites where either the MNI or the dating of the skeletal material is unclear. The MNBF (Minimum Number of Burial Features) includes sites where the number of burial features has been listed either as an absolute value (*e.g.* 100 tombs) or as a general value (*e.g.* multiple tombs). Only definitively dated burial features have been included on the maps.

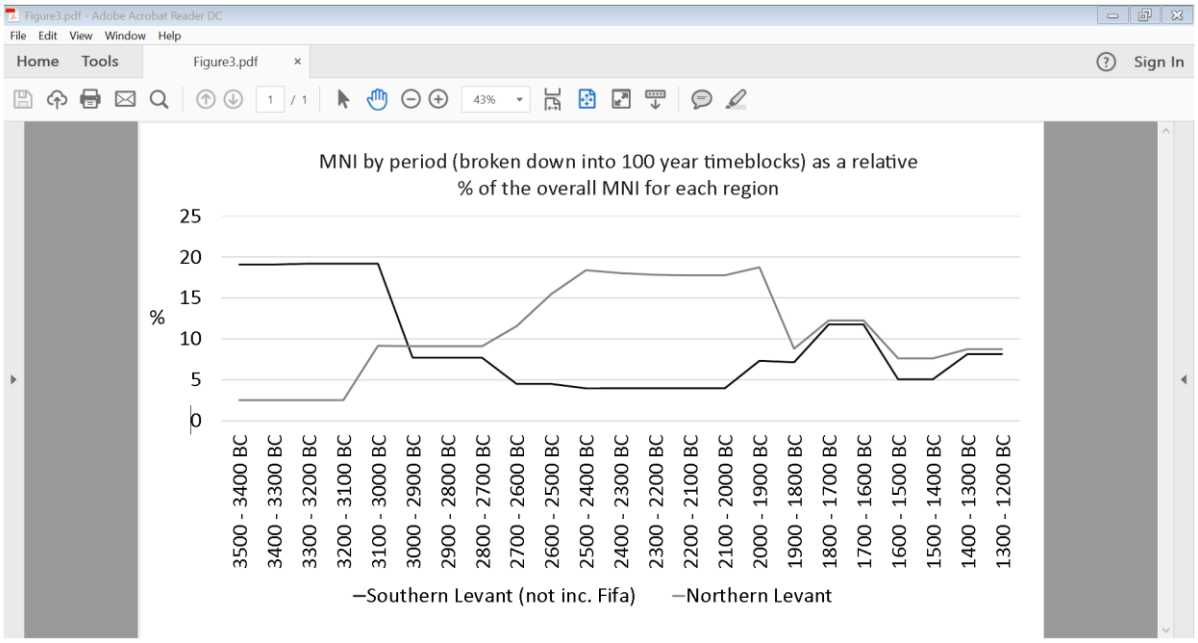

Fig. 8.3. Graph of MNI as a % of overall MNI.

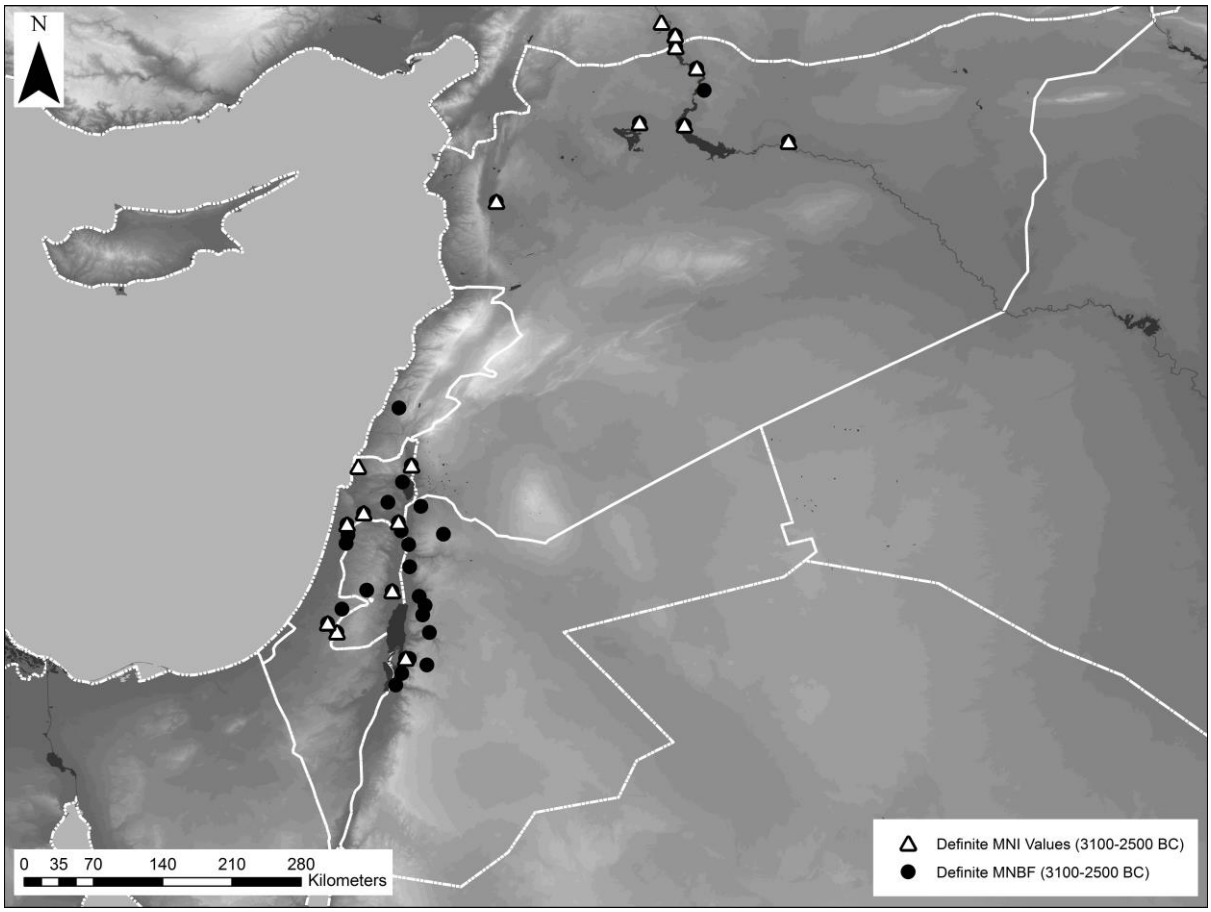

Fig. 8.4. Map of distribution of EB II-III burials (MNI and MNBF).

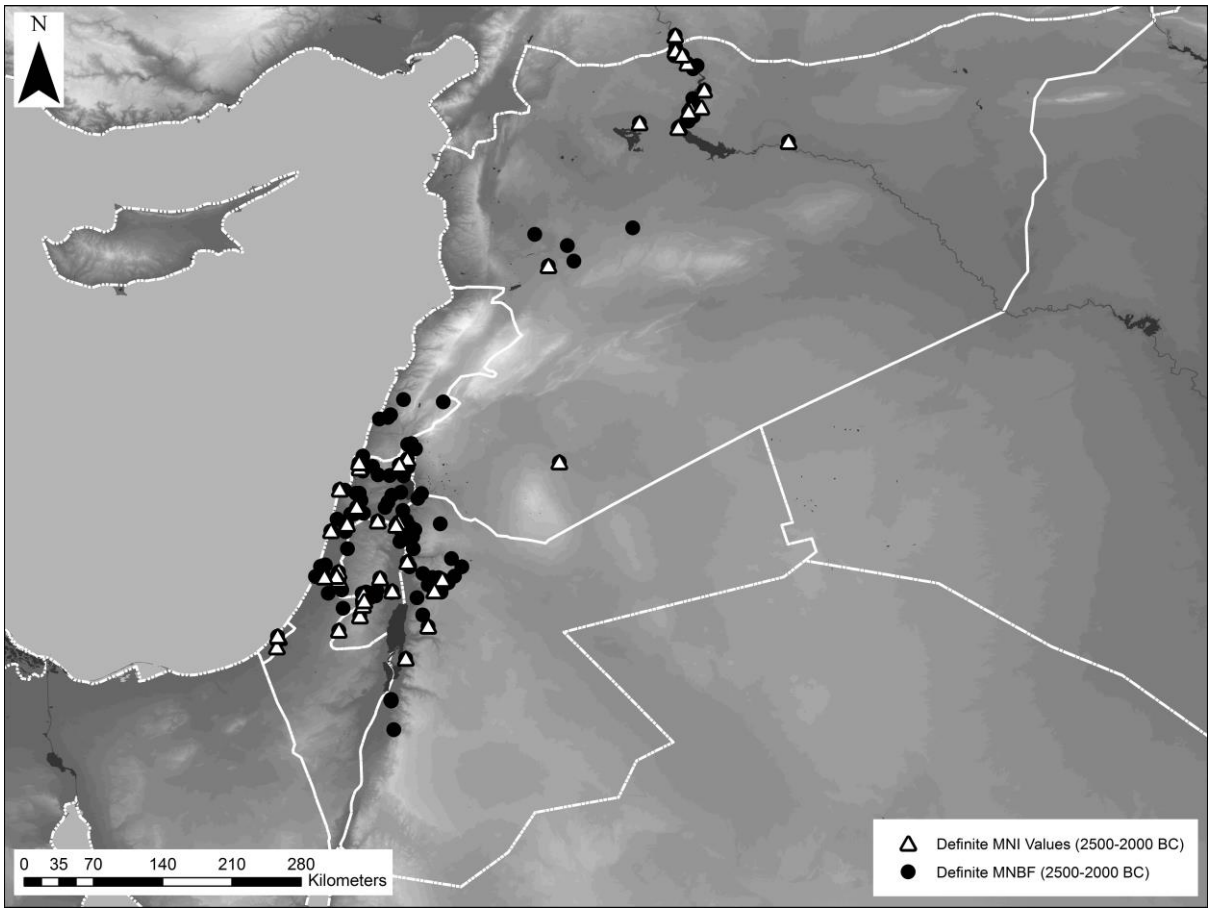

Fig. 8.5. Map of the distribution of EBIV burials (MNI and MNBF).

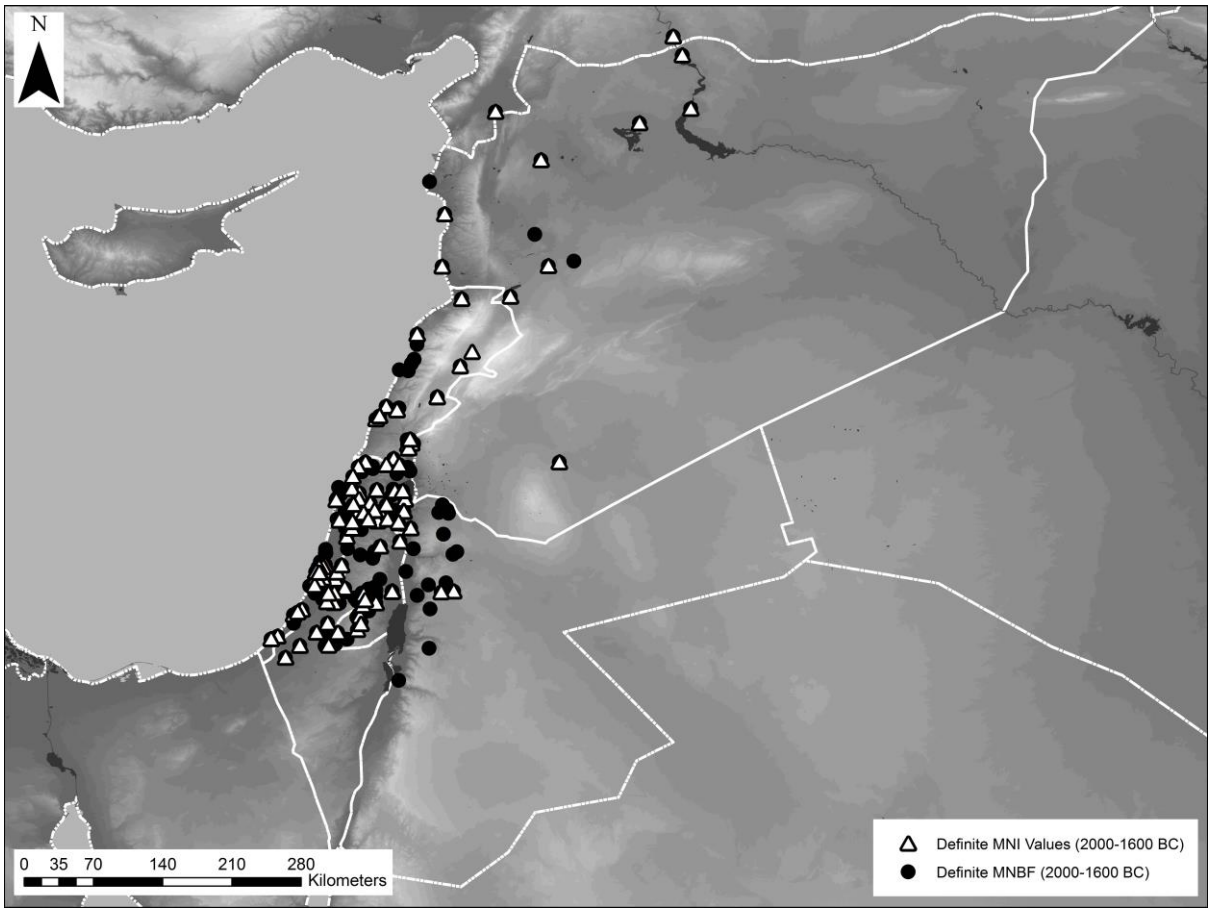

Fig. 8.6a. Map of the distribution of MBA burials (MNI and MNBF).

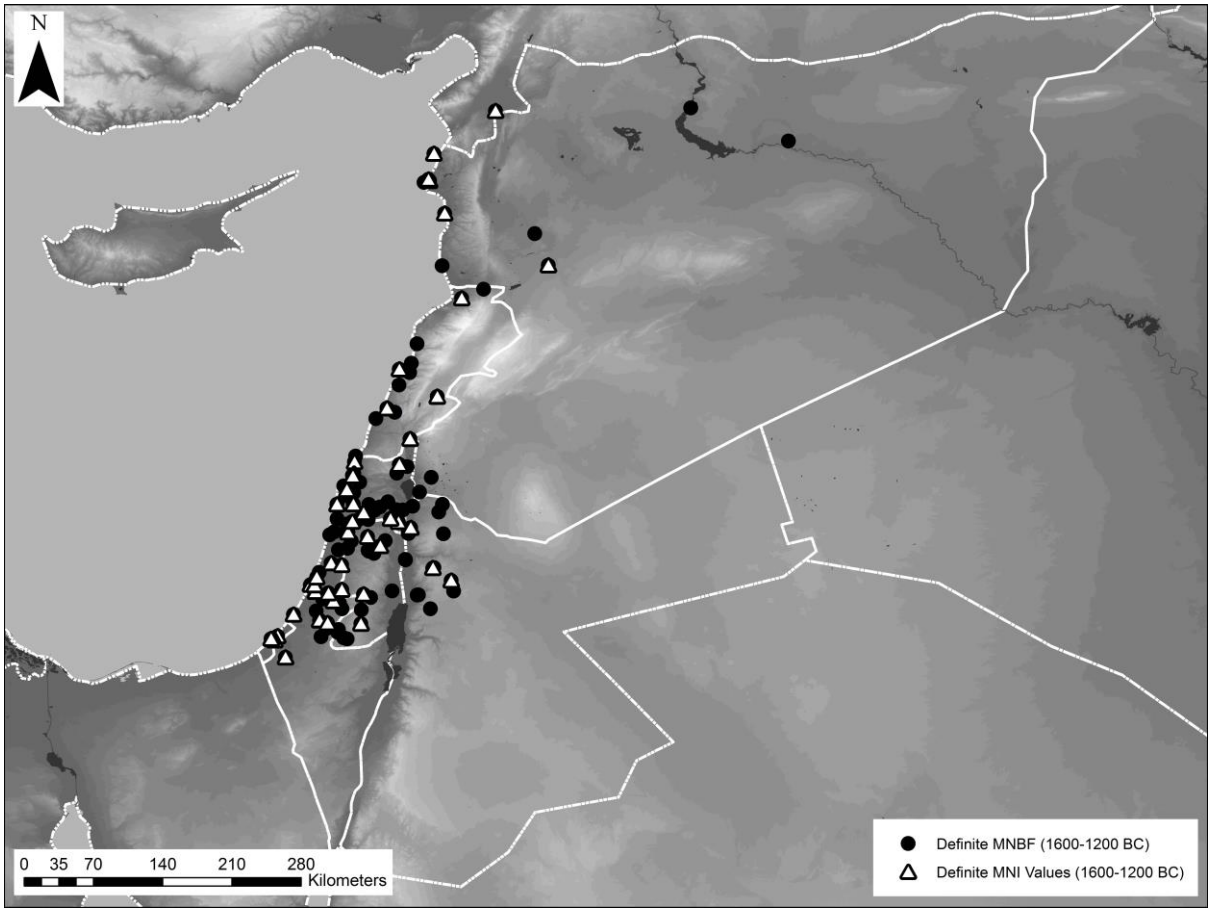

Figure 8.6b Map showing the distribution of LBA burials (MNI and MNBF)

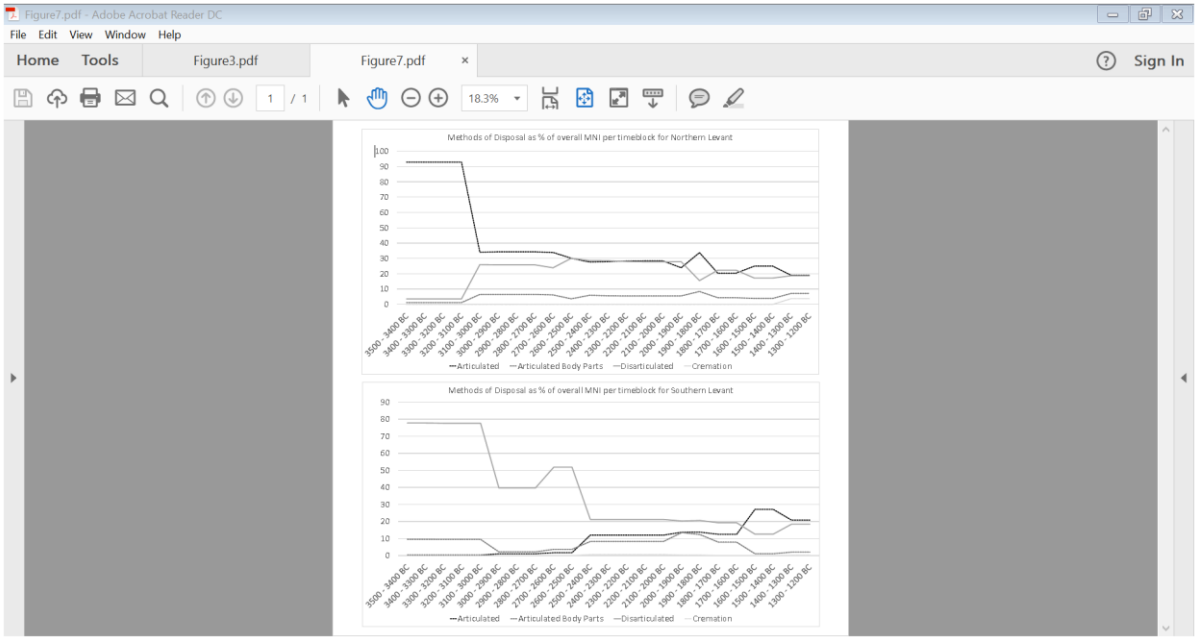

Fig. 8.7. Map of the distribution of LBA dead (MNI and MNBF).

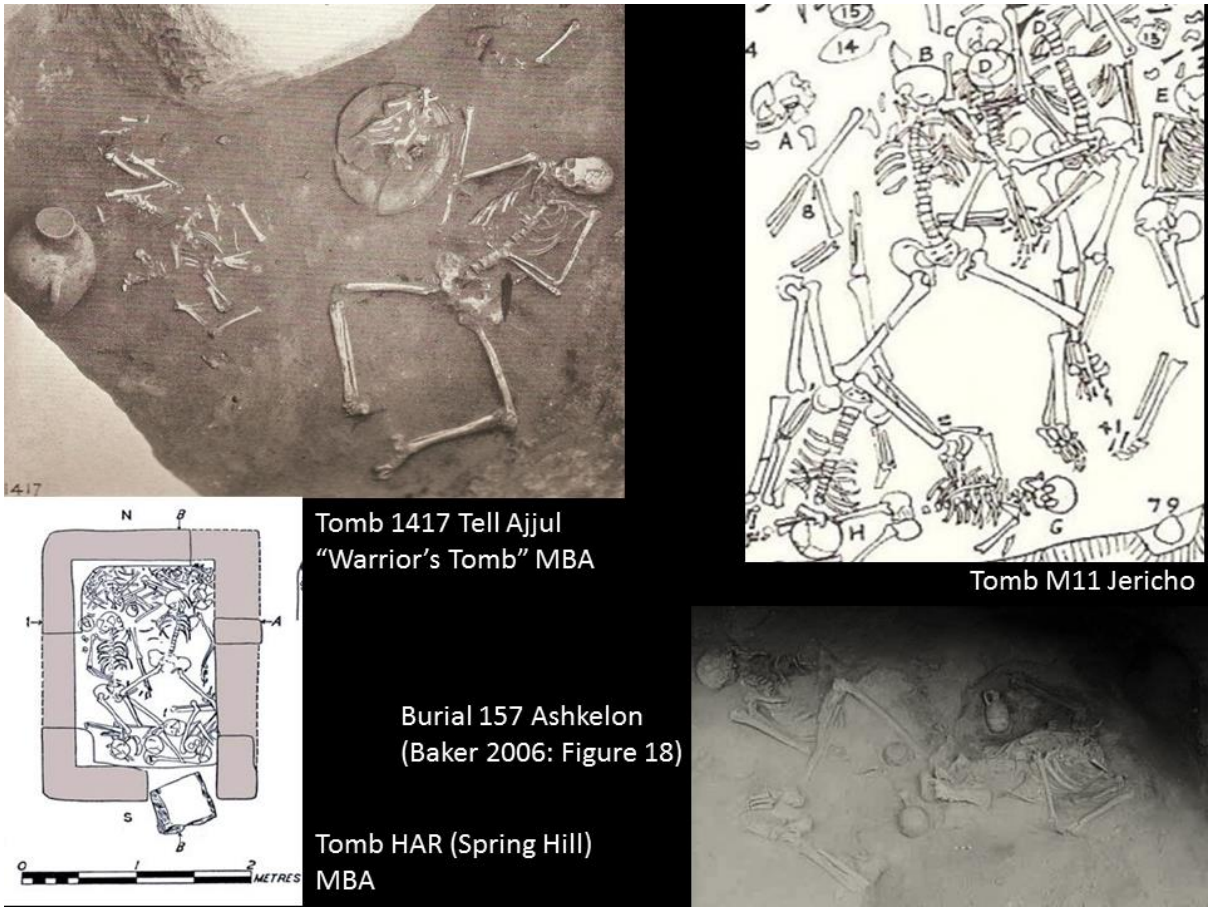
Tomb 1417 Tell Ajjul
"Warrior's Tomb" MBA
Tomb M11 Jericho
Burial 157 Ashkelon
(Baker 2006: Figure 18)
Tomb HAR (Spring Hill)
MBA

Fig. 8.8